DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 428 590 HE 031 907

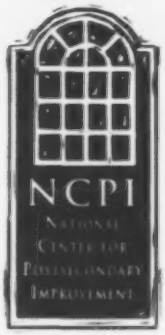
AUTHOR	Marincovich, Michele
TITLE	Ending the Disconnect between the Student Evaluation of Teaching and the Improvement of Teaching: A Faculty Developer's Plea.
INSTITUTION	National Center for Postsecondary Improvement, Stanford, CA.
SPONS AGENCY	Office of Educational Research and Improvement (ED), Washington, DC.
REPORT NO	NCPI-4-02
PUB DATE	1998-00-00
NOTE	16p.
CONTRACT	R309A60001
PUB TYPE	Opinion Papers (120) -- Reports - Evaluative (142)
EDRS PRICE	MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS	*College Faculty; Faculty College Relationship; *Faculty Development; Higher Education; *Instructional Improvement; *Student Evaluation of Teacher Performance

ABSTRACT

This paper offers eight steps institutions of higher education can take to improve teaching through the use of student evaluations. They are: (1) situate the evaluation system firmly within the academic context; (2) strive for quick processing and return of forms; (3) help faculty interpret the evaluation results; (4) create opportunities for peer evaluation; (5) create a grace period in the evaluation of new faculty; (6) educate students regarding their role in an evaluation system; (7) stress the importance of midterm, as well as end-of-term, feedback; and (8) create opportunities for faculty to reflect on their teaching evaluations. Also provided are five related recommendations for teaching centers: first, provide teaching consultation services; second, provide assistance in interpreting students' written comments; third, produce materials that expose faculty to more of the research and thinking on student evaluations; fourth, use the power of stories in faculty development; and, fifth, influence the next generation in the form of teaching assistant training programs. (Contains 30 references.) (DB)

****
* Reproductions supplied by EDRS are the best that can be made *
* from the original document. *
****

ED 428 590



Ending the Disconnect Between the Student Evaluation of Teaching and the Improvement of Teaching: A Faculty Developer's Plea

MICHELE MARINCOVICH

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION
Office of Educational Research and Improvement
EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)
☑ This document has been reproduced as received from the person or organization originating it.
☐ Minor changes have been made to improve reproduction quality.
• Points of view or opinions stated in this document do not necessarily represent official OERI position or policy.

HE 031 907

National Center for Postsecondary Improvement
508 CERAS
School of Education
Stanford University, Stanford, CA 94305-3084

© 1998 National Center for Postsecondary Improvement

The work reported herein was supported in part by the Educational Research and Development Center program, agreement number R309A60001, CFDA 84.309A, as administered by the Office of Educational Research and Improvement (OERI), U.S. Department of Education. The findings and opinions expressed in the report do not reflect the position or policies of OERI or the U.S. Department of Education. Publication Number NCPI-4-02.

Recent articles in the *Chronicle of Higher Education* (Wilson, 1998) and *Change* (Williams and Ceci, 1997), raising questions about the validity and fairness of student evaluations of teaching, have created more interest than usual in the evaluation of faculty's teaching. As director of the Center for Teaching and Learning at Stanford, I have lately found myself fielding inquiries from our faculty about the evaluation controversy and the campus' several student forms for the evaluation of teaching (which vary by School and even department). While I too am concerned about issues raised by the current controversy and am certainly pleased when faculty take an interest in teaching evaluation, for whatever reason, I would raise a very different question about the whole system of student evaluation of teaching on my own and other campuses. For me, the real question is why the hundreds of thousands of end-of-term student evaluation forms that are distributed and processed on college and university campuses across the country seem to have so little impact on the improvement of individual faculty's teaching.

Admittedly, student evaluation of teaching systems do not exist mainly or only to improve faculty teaching. Most can and do serve at least two other purposes (Cohen, 1980; Cashin, 1990)—to provide accurate and reliable data on the quality of faculty's teaching to administrators who must make important decisions on the granting of renewal, tenure, or promotion (and maybe even on salary-setting) and to give students information on faculty teaching that will help them choose which courses to take. (Menges [1990] reminds us that teaching evaluation data can play yet another role—providing information for accreditation reviews.) But important as these other purposes may be, the edifice of teaching evaluation seems a hollow one to me if the individuals being evaluated are not also learning how to be more effective teachers. In the same vein, I suspect grading would be even more distasteful to most faculty if they did not think that careful grading had at least some chance of improving how well a student is learning. Certainly students seem to assume, in my experience, that one of the main reasons they should take time to fill out teaching evaluations is to help faculty get better. Student focus group interviews ("Toward Greater Excellence in Teaching at Stanford," 1995) carried out by a Faculty Senate subcommittee at Stanford (the Subcommittee on the Evaluation and Improvement of Teaching) indicated how important it was to students that faculty seek and use student feedback on their teaching.

Why am I assuming that there aren't changes in faculty teaching as a result of student evaluations? Although some faculty apparently do learn from and act upon their evaluations (Outcalt, 1980), Centra (1993) argues persuasively that improvement occurs only under certain conditions—namely, those involving the acquisition of new knowledge, that is valued, by a teacher who knows how to make changes and is motivated to do so. These are conditions, I would argue, that most of us would easily concede are rarely achieved in the end-of-term student evaluation systems we are familiar with. In an ASHE-ERIC Higher Education Report, Keig and Waggoner (1994) further suggest that there are enough problems associated with summative student evaluation of teaching systems that an alternative, formative system of peer review is both necessary and desirable if the improvement of teaching is to be achieved.

In my own personal experience of having consulted with over two hundred Stanford faculty on their teaching, I have been struck by how few of those eager to, or under pressure to, make significant improvements in their teaching have been able to conclude from their evaluations what improvement strategies to pursue. Even among those who with consultation were able to make significant progress in their teaching—in some cases quite dramatic progress—almost none had achieved noticeable improvement when relying purely on their own reading and analysis of their student evaluation forms. They did not make progress until they took the rather unusual step of working one-on-one with a teaching and learning center. This is consistent with Peter Cohen's (1980) often cited observation that faculty receiving "augmented feedback, or more specifically expert consultation," are much more likely to improve (p. 338).

Why do I say that it is a rather unusual step for a faculty member to consult with a teaching and learning center? Aren't there teaching and learning centers on a majority of our college and university campuses and aren't most of these equipped to do one-on-one consultation with their faculty clients? Although there are hundreds of teaching centers in the United States and although most of these offer individual consultation to faculty (Graf and Wheeler, 1996), a recent telephone survey (Lichtenstein and Deitz, 1998) of such centers at sixteen research universities indicated that many centers are still frustrated by their inability to reach the faculty that might need them the most. A 1995-96 survey (Pihakis and Marincovich, 1998) also indicated that even on campuses with teaching and learning centers, some centers are not empowered to do confidential work with faculty on their teaching evaluations in particular or do not have enough staff members to carry out that kind of work.

I would like to make an impassioned plea, then, for a new commitment to ensure that the time and effort American postsecondary faculty, administrators, and undergraduates are pouring into the end-of-term student evaluation of teaching will result in better teaching. Note, however, that my perspective will be that of a practitioner, someone whose office's mission is to facilitate individual and institutional change. Thus, I will not be talking about what must be done to improve the quality of the teaching evaluation forms themselves nor about the responsible use of the data to make sound administrative decisions, absolutely crucial as both those issues are. I recognize too, of course, that the more confidence faculty have in the reliability and validity of a teaching evaluation system, the more likely it would be that faculty would use the results from it for improvement purposes. Still, I will concentrate instead on the parts of the system that I am most qualified to comment on—steps at the level both of the institution and of the faculty development / teaching center that can be taken to create more improvement as a result of student evaluations.

Before I get into specific steps, however, there is an overarching institutional commitment that must be made before any other measures are to have an effect. And this is, quite simply, that a college or university's leadership must clearly signal the value that it puts on effective teaching and make that value unambiguous through its reward system. Ernest Boyer (1990) argued for the importance of a new regard and conception of teaching far more eloquently and extensively than I can in this paper, so I will not belabor the

point. But an observable institutional commitment to effective teaching and learning is the fulcrum upon which all the other suggestions leverage.

Institutional Steps to Improve Teaching Through the Use of Student Evaluations

1. Situate the Evaluation System Firmly Within the Academic Context

At many institutions, including my own, the teaching evaluation system is run out of a registrar's office, an office well suited to the efficient generation, distribution, and processing of forms, but one not usually associated with scholarship, including the scholarship of teaching (Boyer, 1990). I am not arguing that teaching evaluation systems should instead be run out of teaching and learning centers. Although a few centers do successfully play this role (the Measurement and Evaluation Division in the Office of Instructional Resources at the University of Illinois, Urbana-Champaign, for example), most of us who run or staff centers feel that there is a conflict of interest between the administrative uses of teaching evaluation and our own commitment to confidentiality and improvement. What is important, however, is that the teaching evaluation system be framed within the academic and scholarly mission of the institution. At Yale, for example, the evaluation forms are distributed from the office of the dean of Yale College; a letter from the dean accompanies the forms, reminds faculty of their importance, and mentions the role of the faculty themselves in the adoption and modification of the forms. This sort of decanal imprimatur seems ideal to me. If it is decided that a registrar's office should do the actual distribution and processing of the forms, a letter or other materials from the academic dean could still accompany the forms to situate them in an academic/scholarly context.

2. Strive for the Quick Processing and Return of Forms

If teaching evaluation data are to be taken seriously by faculty for improvement purposes and not just for administrative decision-making, then faculty must receive their results as close to the administration of the forms as possible. Too often weeks or even months pass before faculty know how students rated their courses or commented on their teaching. In my experience, if faculty are already deeply involved in the teaching of another course when the data from a previous course arrive, they are much less motivated to go back and learn what they can about the earlier course. They are already hard pressed and preoccupied by the challenges of their current teaching. (Recall Centra's [1993] emphasis on the importance of faculty being *motivated* to change if evaluation is to result in improvement.) A quick turnaround of the data, on the other hand, will give the faculty feedback when they are more likely to have the time and the interest to give it consideration.

3. Help Faculty to Interpret Their Evaluation Results

It isn't surprising that most faculty, if they read their evaluation results at all, seem to slip them into a drawer and forget them since many evaluation systems, including that at Stanford until recently, did not explicitly indicate to faculty how they could interpret the forms or how they could put the data to use in improving their own teaching. The University of Minnesota (Flash, Tzenis, and Waller, 1995) has produced a particularly exten-

sive handbook for those teaching on campus and interested in learning as much as they can from their evaluations. After providing an interpretation of each item on the evaluation form, the handbook describes strategies for this teaching component that have been effective for other University of Minnesota faculty; it also provides both questions for self-reflection and a short bibliography.

Building on earlier research by Professors Milton Hildebrand, Evelyn R. Dienst, Keith Jacoby, and Dr. Robert C. Wilson, UC Berkeley has gone a step further and has developed a Web-based help system. Although the system was not intended to be used only in association with their teaching evaluation data, faculty whose evaluations indicate that they could improve in some area of their teaching can turn to a website (http://uga.berkeley.edu/sled/compendium) and read about the approaches and techniques of faculty who have been successful in this aspect of instruction. The electronic, nonlinear design of this system makes it easy for faculty to go quickly and directly to the area of teaching that they currently want to explore and to see as many or as few suggestions as they would like. It's a compendium that faculty on any campus would find useful.

At Stanford we have recently tried something a little different from the Minnesota publication mentioned earlier, which is potentially effective but lengthy. Cognizant of faculty's time pressures, our Center produced a six-page guide for faculty and lecturers, sent out under the School of Humanities and Sciences dean's signature, on interpreting and following up on their teaching evaluation forms. We are eager to see whether a very short guide, produced as a result of faculty inspiration and under very close faculty guidance, influences professors' experience with their teaching evaluation forms. Since the guide went out only last month, it is too early to tell. A short brochure of improvement suggestions is also under development. A similar set of materials for teaching assistants, who are evaluated by a different set of forms, is planned for next fall.

4. Create Opportunities for Peer Evaluation

Since 1994 the American Association for Higher Education (AAHE) has spearheaded the Peer Review of Teaching Project (Hutchings, 1995, 1996) with Stanford Professor Lee S. Shulman, who has since become President of the Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching, as its intellectual godfather, and Russell Edgerton, formerly president of AAHE and now director of Education Programs of the Pew Charitable Trusts, and Pat Hutchings, affiliated with both AAHE and the Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching, as its leaders. As coordinator of Stanford's participation in the project, which began with twelve institutions and has spread to many more, I found that the peer approach to teaching evaluation and improvement has had a more profound impact on faculty than most of the other faculty development strategies I have observed over the years. Perhaps because the peer model is so strong in the area of faculty's first passion, their research, faculty eagerly took on the challenge of developing new ways to involve their peers in their teaching life.

Although there was no effort to focus the peer experience particularly on the interpreta-

tion of student evaluations of teaching, peer efforts can nonetheless have a very positive effect on faculty's use of their teaching evaluation data. If peer review consists of junior faculty mentoring by senior faculty, for example, as it did in our English Department, then a natural aspect of such mentoring would be discussion of the junior member's teaching evaluation results. Or, if peer review consists, as it did in our Mechanical Engineering Department, of a multistep process in which a pair or troika of faculty concentrate on one member's experience with a particular course, then the faculty member being evaluated may use this opportunity to explore with thoughtful peers the feedback he or she has received on teaching evaluations and ways to improve the students' experience. Although the whole process is focused on improving a course's effectiveness for students, not the course's ratings, one hopes that the two are intimately connected.

Yet another peer review product, the course portfolio (Hutchings, 1995, 1996) can be ideal for reflection on, and making use of, teaching evaluations. The course portfolio allows a faculty member the scholarly exploration of his or her design, development, implementation, and refinement of a single course. Intended for self- and peer review, this document encourages a deep engagement with student learning and satisfaction, as judged not only by teaching evaluations but also by various measurements of student learning. While the course portfolio need not rely exclusively on student evaluations, such evaluations are one possible measure of success and one possible avenue to improvement. If course portfolios began to circulate among the various disciplines, they could go far to model how faculty might make use of their student evaluation data to make course improvements that would enhance student learning.

Certainly if a campus succeeds in making discussion of teaching a significant part of collegial life, then it may become more likely that a faculty member would decide to talk about his or her teaching evaluations with a colleague. Since consultation, whether with a colleague or a teaching specialist, enhances the possibility of positive change as a result of teaching evaluations (Cohen, 1980), peer review promises great possible benefits.

5. Create a Grace Period in the Evaluation of New Faculty

Pleased as I am when Schools and departments at Stanford take student teaching evaluations seriously, I am not in favor of making student evaluation data from the first year of teaching an official part of a new professor's file or part of a student course guide. Teaching is highly contextual; the success of the teaching in any particular course can be affected by the subject matter, the students, other courses in the department, and even external factors (earthquakes and floods come to mind). Few of us are good teachers in the abstract, without regard to our setting. For this reason, faculty new to an institution deserve a settling-in period, a time when they should receive student evaluation feedback but not be penalized or paralyzed by it if they initially have a lot to learn. McKeachie (1979) warns us of how devastating "low ratings and critical comments" on student evaluations can be (p. 388).

The very fact that new faculty are given a period of time in which to benefit from their student evaluation data without having to fear that it will be used against them should

drive home the point that one of the reasons for the collection of the data in the first place is to improve teaching. Too often young faculty receive the message that they must be successful right from the beginning. Although I hope that Teaching Assistant (TA) development programs at the graduate level will some day make it more likely that novice faculty will be successful teachers from the very start, even experienced teachers may still have to learn things about the characteristics and capabilities of the students at their new institution. There should be a "safe" period for this process.

6. Educate Students Regarding Their Role in an Evaluation System

As noted earlier, one reason for a student evaluation system is to give students information that will be helpful to them in choosing which classes to take (Cohen, 1980). On many campuses, this is achieved through a student-run course guide system. Perhaps the oldest and best known is the Committee on Undergraduate Education Course Evaluation Guide at Harvard. Stanford students are currently struggling to revive a course guide system that existed on campus for many years and to avoid some of the problems that contributed to its demise. Essentially, student editors of that earlier guide tended toward the colorful, often choosing to print the student comments about a course that were the most attention-getting. As you can imagine, because faculty were free to release or not release their data to the guide, those who were burned by earlier comments often stopped participating. Soon a dwindling number of courses were covered and the guide became of marginal use.

Students at any institution must realize that both in their individual comments and in a student course guide, it is the constructive criticism that is likely to do the most good. Just as students would highly criticize a faculty member who gave them harsh, blunt comments on their papers or homework, so too they should concentrate in their evaluation forms on tactful feedback that indicates why a change seems important and how it could be done. Faculty members are increasingly being urged to be coaches and mentors to their students; in the area of teaching, students might themselves take on the attitude of coach and concentrate on direct, constructive, and practical feedback. To achieve this at Stanford, we have been exploring the possibility of training students in their evaluation role during their initial orientation period to the university.

7. Stress the Importance of Midterm, as Well as End-of-Term, Feedback

Although the literature on the evaluation and improvement of teaching stresses the importance of midterm evaluation (Centra, 1993), too many teaching evaluation systems are entirely preoccupied with summative judgments only. Most teaching centers can offer faculty various ways of obtaining formative feedback, either on their own or with the help of the center. In addition to various kinds of written midterm forms, many of us offer the so-called SGID (Small Group Instructional Diagnosis—Clark, 1982), a structured midterm interview of a class, with the students divided into small groups, which provides specific feedback on what the students like about a course, what they feel needs improvement, and their ideas on how to carry out the improvement. Although this method takes approximately twenty minutes of class time, it has the unique advantage of exposing stu-

dents to what their peers think of a course's strengths and weaknesses. Any official teaching evaluation system should make sure that faculty know about the availability and the desirability of midterm approaches. Certainly faculty should know that professors who do midterm evaluations can achieve higher end-of-term evaluations (Cohen, 1980; Overall and Marsh, 1979). Yale is again a case in point; the Yale College dean's letter regarding the summative evaluation system also mentions that Course Improvement Forms, intended for midterm use, will be sent to the faculty by the registrar along with their preliminary class lists.

Let me emphasize, however, that the results of any midterm evaluations should remain formative and confidential, as the Yale College dean makes clear in his letter. Although midterm evaluations should be an encouraged part of any student evaluation system, they should not suffer the same fate as the end-of-term student evaluations have. As Centra (1993) points out, the end-of-term student ratings also began as formative feedback; they became summative when colleges and universities found themselves needing an objective and quantifiable source of data on teaching that would help them make sensitive and important personnel decisions.

8. Create Opportunities for Reflection on One's Teaching Evaluations

Many campuses require that faculty write an annual review of their previous year's efforts. Although these are generally heavily weighted toward faculty's research accomplishments and publications, such reviews can also encourage reflection on one's teaching evaluations in particular and plans for change or improvement. Course portfolios, described earlier, and teaching portfolios are particularly ideal vehicles for ensuring that student evaluations are put to thoughtful use rather than languishing in a faculty member's file cabinet or, worse, in a circular file. It is even better if department chairs use the annual review or a teaching/course portfolio to underscore to their faculty that their interest in evaluation results is not punitive but constructive. For too many faculty, attention to teaching evaluations comes not when they are satisfactory or even outstanding but when they are troublesome. It is little wonder that new faculty feel at risk if their student evaluations indicate a less than successful start.

Teaching Center Efforts in Utilizing Student Evaluations for Teaching Improvement

In addition to measures that an institution's administration should take to encourage positive change as a result of teaching evaluations, faculty development/teaching centers can play an important role in this process.

1. Provide Teaching Consultation Services

First, of course, if its staffing allows, a teaching center should be sure to offer one-on-one teaching consultation services to teachers on its campus so that any professor or TA seeking help in interpreting and acting on their teaching evaluation results will have it. Although many centers do provide such a service, it is by no means universal (Graf and Wheeler, 1996). Individual consultation is very labor intensive and can be especially

frustrating for all involved if an individual faculty member takes steps to improve his or her effectiveness but finds no departmental support or appreciation for these efforts. Many centers, in fact, prefer to concentrate on organizational, rather than individual, changes because of the road blocks that the lone faculty member can face when trying to improve.

The solution may be, as I mentioned previously, some sort of peer review effort. Even if a teaching center is not able to obtain the interest of a whole department in looking at its members' teaching, it may be able to attract a critical mass of faculty interested in working together for greater teaching effectiveness. Although peer review certainly doesn't have to concentrate on discussion of teaching evaluation data, it can easily include such a result.

2. Provide Assistance in Interpreting Students' Written Comments

From the students' point of view, probably the most time-consuming part of filling in teaching evaluation forms is answering the forms' open-ended questions, and yet probably the most underutilized of all the data on the forms are the students' written comments. Since experts (Arreola, 1995; Braskamp and Ory, 1994; Centra, 1993) on teaching evaluation consider the close-ended, global items on teaching evaluation forms the most reliable for summative purposes, I am not urging that more use be made of student written comments in administrative decision-making. But, if analyzed properly, they could be of great help for improvement purposes. Faculty often profess the greatest interest in these responses, and yet they can also find them contradictory or confusing. Unfortunately, very little has been written on the topic of analyzing students' written comments, and some teaching centers provide little or no help in making sense of the comments (Pihakis and Marincovich, forthcoming).

Yet teaching centers can offer faculty significant help, both directly and indirectly, in understanding their student comments. First, centers can suggest methodologies for analyzing the student comments. Most faculty seem to read through each student's comments completely before going on to the next student's form. Yet reading the comments question by question, instead of form by form, is a small change that can make it more likely helpful patterns will emerge. Even better, faculty might first organize students' comments by the overall rating that the student gave the faculty member (Lewis, 1991-92), using for this the rating from the global question that most forms contain on the faculty member's teaching overall or the value of the course overall. By reading together all the comments of students who gave them a high overall score, a middling score, and a low score, faculty are more likely to detect if the students who are less satisfied with the course identify certain common problems. Lewis (1991-92) suggests that one can go even further in organizing the student comments by grouping them into a matrix that uses the overall rating for one axis and characteristics of effective teaching (such as organization, enthusiasm, etc.) for the other axis. Or, one could put along the second axis certain themes especially appropriate to this course (for example, the quality of problems in a problem-based learning course).

The University of Rhode Island's end-of-term form has an interesting approach that faculty might consider adding to their own institution's questionnaires. Questions 25a and 25b on the Rhode Island Teaching Questionnaire ask students to comment on "what made you rate the course as high as you did?" and "what kept you from rating the course higher?" Even if faculty can't add these questions to the forms they use, they might have these questions in the back of their minds as they try to make sense of their students' comments.

Finally, A. A. Morrison (1995) of the Higher Education Research Office of the University of Aukland has made an interesting suggestion regarding the processing of student comments. In an effort to develop a less labor-intensive means of providing their faculty with a qualitative analysis of their student comments, he first did a study "to determine the most common positive and negative qualities of university teachers. We now simply make a check mark against the appropriate category [for each student comment] and the resulting 'graph' becomes a visual record of responses" (p. 561). If other centers test this out, perhaps we will discover that most of us can be far more helpful to faculty in processing their student written comments than we ever imagined.

3. Produce Materials that Expose Faculty to More of the Research and Thinking on Student Evaluations

It has been observed (Keller, 1985) that faculty members in general make little use of the research on higher education that higher education itself produces. In my experience, this is especially true of the research on student evaluations of teaching. The current evaluation controversy highlighted in *The Chronicle of Higher Education* (Wilson, 1998) and *Change* (Williams and Ceci, 1997) has generated as much enthusiasm as it has, I would hazard, because faculty have largely ignored previous research confirming the reliability and validity of student evaluations. The *Chronicle* and *Change* articles are consistent with long-held faculty myths about student evaluations that researchers on the topic have never fully been able to combat.

In this environment, teaching centers, educational researchers, and administrators can at least try to remind their constituencies of the careful research that is available to inform almost every decision that has to be made about a teaching evaluation system and the responsible use of data from it. My center has done workshops, newsletters, and sections of our teaching handbook on the topic of teaching evaluation and improvement, highlighting the relevant research. Before initiating a review of the teaching evaluation system in his School, our Dean of Humanities and Sciences, in collaboration with the Vice Provost for Undergraduate Education, solicited and received from our Center a background memorandum on teaching evaluation. Teaching centers should not only take full advantage of such opportunities when they arise but create them whenever they can. We are fortunate that there is now a legion of readable, recent, and useful books on this topic, for our own and our colleagues' consumption (Arreola, 1995; Braskamp and Ory, 1994; Centra, 1993; Richlin and Manning, 1995; among others).

4. Use the Power of Stories

We have all seen the tide of a committee's deliberations turned by the well-chosen and compelling anecdote. Influencing faculty's attitudes toward their own teaching evaluations is no different. It is important that faculty hear stories of professors who had significant teaching evaluation problems and solved them. I am never happier on our own campus than when an award-winning teacher mentions that he or she was not always so successful, that she had low ratings in the beginning but in fact went on to raise them, not through pandering to students or inflating grades but through better understanding students' learning needs or her role as a teacher. Although our Center's lecture series "Award-Winning Teachers on Teaching" was not set up specifically to provide such a forum, in fact it often has.

Even better, we can use the articles that exist, and encourage more such articles, in which faculty publicly grapple with the strengths and weaknesses of student evaluations of teaching in general or their own teaching evaluations. Peter Elbow's (1992) thoughtful "Making Better Use of Student Evaluations of Teachers" should appeal not only to his fellow professors of English but to any faculty member or faculty committee struggling with the role of student evaluations on their campus. And faculty inside and outside of Chemistry will appreciate Roald Hoffmann and Brian Coppola's (1996) meditation on approaching and learning from the student evaluations of their Chemistry course.

We should also encourage faculty to talk more with students about how previous student evaluations have helped to shape their courses, thereby letting students know that previous evaluations were indeed read and paid attention to. One of Stanford's award-winning teachers indicated that when he discussed the design of a course at the first class, he would mention how evaluation feedback from previous students in the class had influenced his choice of textbook, topics, assignments, and other major elements of the course. He left little doubt that previous student evaluations had been carefully read and, if possible, acted upon.

5. Influence the Next Generation

A recent survey (Graf and Wheeler, 1996) indicated that at 25 percent of teaching centers the staff were managing a TA development program. As a forthcoming publication will indicate (Marincovich, Prostko, and Stout, in press), the old notion of "TA training" has undergone such enormous change that the degree of teaching preparation that most graduate students are now receiving is an order of magnitude greater than before. As a result, some institutions are now calling their TA programs "Preparing Future Faculty" (Tice, Gaff, and Pruitt-Logan, in press) and are equipping their graduates to be experienced, successful, and evaluated teachers by the time they step into their first assistant professorship.

In this climate, teaching centers can take advantage of their greater interaction with teaching assistants to encourage the practice of learning from and reflecting upon one's student evaluations of teaching. Since these future faculty will almost inevitably begin their

careers on a campus with student evaluations of teaching, their professional development demands that they are prepared for these "tests" of their teaching competence. Unlike many of today's faculty, they will not know a world where student evaluations are optional or unimportant. With this generation, teaching centers have a golden opportunity to instill positive attitudes toward the constructive use of student ratings and comments.

Conclusion

Within a mere twenty to thirty years, the student evaluation of teaching on American college and university campuses has gone from a relatively rare, improvement-oriented exercise to an almost universal, administratively-oriented summative system that materially affects the careers of junior and even senior faculty throughout the United States (Baiocco and DeWaters, 1998; Centra, 1993). In the process, much of the power of students' ratings and comments to constructively criticize faculty and improve the teaching students receive has been lost. Admittedly, there are many other ways to engage faculty and students in positive instructional change, including midterm evaluations, Angelo and Cross's (1993) classroom assessment techniques, peer review and collaboration, and assessment of learning outcomes, to name just a few. But none of these is as universal and none has the institutional investment and influence that the student evaluation of teaching system currently has. To whatever degree possible, let us reclaim that system for improvement purposes and thereby give it the kind of integrity that a system for pure summative judgment cannot have.

References

Angelo, T. A., and Cross, K. P. (1993). *Classroom Assessment Techniques: A Handbook for College Teachers*. 2nd ed. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.

Arreola, R. A. (1995). *Developing a Comprehensive Faculty Evaluation System: A Handbook for College Faculty and Administrators on Designing and Operating a Comprehensive Faculty Evaluation System*. Bolton, MA: Anker Publishing.

Baiocco, S. A., and DeWaters, J. N. (1998). *Successful College Teaching: Problem-Solving Strategies of Distinguished Professors*. Boston: Allyn and Bacon.

Boyer, E. L. (1990). *Scholarship Reconsidered: Priorities of the Professoriate*. Princeton, NJ: Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching.

Braskamp, L. A., and Ory, J. C. (1994). *Assessing Faculty Work: Enhancing Individual and Institutional Performance*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.

Cashin, W. E. (January, 1990). "Student Ratings of Teaching: Recommendations for Use." IDEA Paper No. 22, Center for Faculty Evaluation and Development, Kansas State University.

Centra, J. A. (1993). *Reflective Faculty Evaluation: Enhancing Teaching and Determining Faculty Effectiveness*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.

Clark, J., and Redmond, M. V. (1982). "Small Group Instructional Diagnosis: Final Report." Washington, D. C.: Fund for the Improvement of Postsecondary Improvement. (ERIC Document Reproduction Service No. ED 217 954)

Cohen, P. A. (1980). "Effectiveness of Student Rating Feedback for Improving College Instruction: A Meta-Analysis of Findings." *Research in Higher Education*, 13 (4), 321-341.

Flash, P., Tzenis, C., and Waller, A. (1995). *Using Student Evaluations to Increase Classroom Effectiveness*. 2nd ed. Minneapolis: The Faculty and TA Enrichment Program, University of Minnesota.

Graf, D. L., and Wheeler, D. (1996). *Defining the Field: The POD Membership Survey*. POD Network.

Hoffmann, R., and Coppola, B. P. (1996). "Some Heretical Thoughts on What Our Students Are Telling Us." *Journal of College Science Teaching*, 25, 390-394.

Hutchings, P. (ed.). (1995). *From Idea to Prototype: The Peer Review of Teaching: A Project Handbook*. Washington, D.C.: The American Association for Higher Education.

Hutchings, P. (ed.). (1996). *Making Teaching Community Property: A Menu for Peer Collaboration and Peer Review.* Washington, D.C.: The American Association for Higher Education.

Keig, L., and Waggoner, M. D. (1994). *Collaborative Peer Review: The Role of Faculty in Improving College Teaching.* ASHE-ERIC Report No. 2. Washington, D. C.: George Washington University.

Keller, G. (1985). "Trees Without Fruit: The Problem with Research About Higher Education." *Change,* January / February, pp. 7-10.

Lewis, K. G. (1991-92). "Making Sense (and Use) of Written Student Comments." *Teaching Excellence,* 3 (8), 1-2.

Lichtenstein, G., and Deitz, J. (1998). (Survey of 16 research university teaching centers regarding their current services and priorities.) Unpublished survey.

Marincovich, M., Prostko, J., and Stout, F. (In press). *The Professional Development of Graduate Teaching Assistants.* Bolton, MA: Anker Publishing.

McKeachie, W. J. (October, 1979) "Student Ratings of Faculty: A Reprise." *Academe,* 384-397.

Menges, R. J. (1990). "Using Evaluative Information to Improve Instruction." In P. Seldin and Associates. *How Administrators Can Improve Teaching: Moving from Talk to Action in Higher Education.* San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.

Morrison, A. A. (1995). "Analyzing Qualitative Responses on Student Evaluations: An Efficient and Effective Method." *Higher Education Research and Development Proceedings,* Vol. 18, pp. 559-564.

Outcalt, D. L. (ed.). (1980). *Report of the Task Force on Teaching Evaluation.* Berkeley: University of California Press.

Overall, J. U., IV, and Marsh, H. W. (1979). "Midterm Feedback from Students: Its Relationship to Instructional Improvement and Students; Cognitive and Affective Outcomes." *Journal of Educational Psychology,* 71, 856-865.

Pihakis, J., and Marincovich, M. (1998). "Making Use of Students' Open-Ended Comments on Teaching Evaluation Forms." Manuscript in preparation.

Richlin, L., and Manning, B. (1995). *Improving A College/University Teaching Evaluation System: A Comprehensive, Developmental Curriculum for Faculty and Administrators.* 2nd ed. Pittsburgh, PA: Alliance Publishers.

Tice, S. L., Gaff, J. G., and Pruitt-Logan, A. S. (In press). "Preparing Future Faculty Programs: Beyond TA Development." In M. Marincovich, J. Prostko, and F. Stout. *The Professional Development of Graduate Teaching Assistants*. Bolton, MA: Anker Publishing.

"Toward Greater Excellence in Teaching at Stanford: Final Report of the C-AAA Sub-Committee on the Evaluation and Improvement of Teaching." (1995). Stanford University.

Williams, W. M., and Ceci, S. J. (1997). "'How'm I Doing?: Problems with Student Ratings of Instructors and Courses." *Change*, September/October, pp. 13-23.

Wilson, R. (1998). "New Research Casts Doubt on Value of Student Evaluations of Professors." *The Chronicle of Higher Education*, January 16, pp. A12-14.